PHOTOGRAPHY TERMS

Adjustable Camera
A camera with manually adjustable settings for distance, lens openings, and shutter speeds.

Ambient Light
The available light completely surrounding a subject. Light already existing in an indoor or outdoor setting that is not caused by any illumination supplied by the photographer.

Angle Of View
The area of a scene that a lens covers or sees. Angle of view is determined by the focal length of the lens. A wide-angle lens (short-focal-length) includes more of the scene—a wider angle of view—than a normal (normal-focal-length) or telephoto (long-focal-length) lens.

Aperture
Lens opening. The opening in a camera lens through which light passes to expose the film. The size of aperture is either fixed or adjustable. Aperture size is usually calibrated in f-numbers—the larger the number, the smaller the lens opening.

Aspect Ratio
The ratio of width to height in photographic prints - 2:3 in 35 mm pictures to produce photographs most commonly measuring 3.5 x 5 inches or 4 x 6 inches.

Autofocus (AF)
System by which the camera lens automatically focuses the image of a selected part of the picture subject.

Automatic Camera
A camera with a built-in exposure meter that automatically adjusts the lens opening, shutter speed, or both for proper exposure.

Background
The part of the scene that appears behind the principal subject of the picture.

Backlighting
Light coming from behind the subject, toward the camera lens, so that the subject stands out vividly against the background. Sometimes produces a silhouette effect.

Balance
Placement of colors, light and dark masses, or large and small objects in a picture to create harmony and equilibrium.

Candid Pictures
Unposed pictures of people, often taken without the subject's knowledge. These usually appear more natural and relaxed than posed pictures.

Close-Up
A picture taken with the subject close to the camera—usually less than two or three feet away, but it can be as close as a few inches.

Composition
The pleasing arrangement of the elements within a scene—the main subject, the foreground and background, and supporting subjects.

Contrast
The range of difference in the light to dark areas of a negative, print, or slide (also called density); the brightness range of a subject or the scene lighting.

Cropping
Printing only part of the image that is in the negative or slide, usually for a more pleasing composition. May also refer to the framing of the scene in the viewfinder.

Definition
The clarity of detail in a photograph.

Existing Light
Available light. This covers all natural lighting from moonlight to sunshine. For photographic purposes, existing light is the light that is already on the scene or project and includes room lamps, fluorescent lamps, spotlights, neon signs, candles, daylight through windows, outdoor scenes at twilight or in moonlight.

Exposure
The quantity of light allowed to act on a photographic material; a product of the intensity (controlled by the lens opening) and the duration (controlled by the shutter speed or enlarging time) of light striking the film or paper.
Fill-In Light
Additional light from a lamp, flash, or reflector; used to soften or fill in the shadows or dark picture areas caused by the brighter main light. Called fill-in flash when electronic flash is used.

Film Speed
The sensitivity of a given film to light, indicated by a number such as ISO 200. The higher the number, the more sensitive or faster the film. Note: ISO stands for International Standards Organization.

Finder
A viewing device on a camera to show the subject area that will be recorded on the film. Also known as viewfinder and projected frame.

Flash
A brief, intense burst of light from a flashbulb or an electronic flash unit, usually used where the lighting on the scene is inadequate for picture-taking.

Foreground
The area between the camera and the principal subject.

Graininess
The sand-like or granular appearance of a negative, print, or slide. Graininess becomes more pronounced with faster film and the degree of enlargement.

LCD panel
Liquid Crystal Display on cameras that shows such information as remaining exposures, flash status and aspect ratio selected.

Lens
One or more pieces of optical glass or similar material designed to collect and focus rays of light to form a sharp image on the film, paper, or projection screen.

Negative
The developed film that contains a reversed tone image of the original scene.

Overexposure
A condition in which too much light reaches the film, producing a dense negative or a very light print or slide.

Processing
Developing, fixing, and washing exposed photographic film or paper to produce either a negative image or a positive image.

Shutter
Blades, a curtain, plate, or some other movable cover in a camera that controls the time during which light reaches the film.

Single-Lens-Reflex (SLR) Camera
A camera in which you view the scene through the same lens that takes the picture.

Telephoto Lens
A lens that makes a subject appear larger on film than does a normal lens at the same camera-to-subject distance. A telephoto lens has a longer focal length and narrower field of view than a normal lens.

Tripod
A three-legged supporting stand used to hold the camera steady. Especially useful when using slow shutter speeds and/or telephoto lenses.

Underexposure
A condition in which too little light reaches the film, producing a thin negative, a dark slide, or a muddy-looking print.

Wide-Angle Lens
A lens that has a shorter focal length and a wider field of view (includes more subject area) than a normal lens.

Zoom Lens
A lens in which you adjust the focal length over a wide range. In effect, this gives you lenses of many focal lengths.